Stephen Reeves 9/27

Writing 105 Essay

*“You're not disabled by the disabilities you have, you are able by the abilities you have."*

***Oscar Pistorius***

Oscar Pistorius is the “fastest man on no legs”1. The image below shows the accomplished Paralympic runner putting on his carbon fiber prosthetics used for running. Pistorius has not let his disability slow him down from being the one of the best runners in the world. He has not let words or definitions encumber him from living his life. Simi Linton wrote in “Reassigning Meaning” that due to the medical meaning of disability, people with disabilities are looked upon as if they had a disadvantage. Pistorius ironically has been accused of having an unfair advantage while racing against able-bodied runners. Pistorius’ quote above demonstrates the mindset he is in. He does not concentrate on his disabilities, but rather the abilities he has and augments them.

Pistorius was born with a congenital absence of the fibula in both legs. This caused the need for both of Pistorius’ legs to be amputated when he was 11 months old. Pistorius began running in 2004, and later that year competed in 2004 Summer Paralympic games in Athens, Greece. In the years following Pistorius and his carbon fiber prosthetics, set new world records for people with disabilities at the Paralympics. In 2007 Oscar decided to try to compete in the abled-bodied Olympic Games. The problems impeding Pistorius from competing are the qualifiers and the International Association of Athletics Federations (track and field’s governing body). The I.A.A.F. has been investigating if Pistorius’ artificial legs give him an advantage over other able-bodied runners. In most peoples’ mind this is a ridiculous accusation, but the I.A.A.F. must research the matter before they let Pistorius race in the Olympics. Pistorius defended himself in a **USA Today** article by saying "There's absolutely no reason why they should keep me from running. These prosthetics have been around for 14 years, the exact same design. There's never been an amputee to run close to my time." The I.A.A.F. did let Pistorius try to qualify for the 2008 Games, but he missed the Olympic team by.7 seconds. The image below is an image of controversy in the sports world. It also has a large social impact in the disability community.

Tim Ockenden of the Associated Press photographed the picture below of Pistorius. The picture was taken from a **New York Times** article entitled “Double Amputee to Face Top Able-Bodied Sprinters.” by Frank Litsky. The article was written in 2007 just before the Beijing Olympics. It explained that the I.A.A.F. will let Pistorius try qualifying, but it will research any advantages caused by his carbon fiber appendages. At first glance one would not be able to tell this disabled runner is in the middle of a controversy about him going to the able-bodied Olympics. Upon further inspection one begins to realize that this man is a professional runner, he has the proper clothing and high tech prosthetics. The actually meaning of this picture becomes clearer with more background information on Pistorius. In the picture Pistorius is most likely training in South Africa, his home country.

Rosemarie Garland Thomson, author of “Beholding”, writes about the “Ethics of Looking.” Garland Thomson explains that author, Elaine Scarry, believes that “it is not beauty that attracts us per se but rather by attracting us something becomes beauty.”2 When people stare at the image below it may invoke feelings of curiosity or disbelief that an amputee can run. After further examination and analyzing it becomes less of picture of an amputee runner, but more of a picture of just a runner. One may now see this pictures beauty. Oscar Pistorius is not ashamed or embarrassed of his disability. He is proud of what he accomplished in his life thus far. The quote above explains that Pistorius does not let his disability keep him from doing things he lets his abilities dictate what he does. He also does not consider himself at a disadvantage or an advantage.

Simi Linton wrote in “Reassigning Meaning” that the disabled community is at a disadvantage in society. She continues to say in the article, that because of the medical meaning of the term disability, which is as she defines from *Stedman’s Medical Dictionary* as the “medicolegal term signifying loss of function and earning power,” society has look upon disabled people as weak and dependent on others3. Society thus, has deemed what was normal and abnormal. This image allows society to re-imagine what is normal. Seeing a disabled runner compete not just against any able-bodied runner, but the world’s best able-bodied runners, brings a sense of normalcy to this picture. If Pistorius wins qualifications and makes it on to the South African Olympics team he will become the first amputee runner to compete in the able-bodied Olympics5. The 2012 Olympic Games could be a monumental achievement for the disabled community, because of the social advance that comes with such a victory.

The I.A.A.F. has decided to let Pistorius compete in the 2012 London Olympics. The I.A.A.F has made the right decision. Pistorius have worked hard, which lead to him shattering old Paralympic records. Oscar Pistorius is a role model for both disabled children and able-bodied children around the globe. Pistorius is giving hope to disabled people who want to excel in sports or anything else, for that matter. Pistorius is blending the hypothetical social lines of the able-bodied and the disabled. This picture embodies what Pistorius stands for, strength, courage, and persistence.

1. <http://current.com/1ojvq4c>
2. “Beholding” by Rosemarie Garland Thomson
3. “Reassigning Meaning” by Simi Linton
4. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/11/sports/othersports/11amputee.html?\_r=2



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